

Sketch

Volume 74, Number 2

2010

Article 11

Fowl Play

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Fowl Play

Matthew Cooper

Robert White stirred from his sleep grumpily as once more Phyllis had awoken him as the first rays of sunlight had seeped through the blinds of the window. He rolled over on his side with frustration, trying to accept that his peaceful night's rest was over. He pushed his hand into his still sleepy eyes. Glancing over his shoulder towards where his companion still paced back and forth nosily, showing her unease, Robert tried his best to hide his annoyance. Every morning since Robert had left his home, Phyllis had awoken him, each day becoming earlier than the one before. Now sitting over the side of the bed, fully awake, Robert couldn't even bring himself to look and see what Phyllis was picking at, creating a sound of nails being hammered into tin to fill the room. He wouldn't even mind her clanking around quite so much if she could just make me a cup of coffee every once and awhile. With a sigh, Robert quickly removed the notion from his head. He knew asking something like that was a little unreasonable considering the situation.

Today Robert's brother Buckley was supposed to come by so the two could discuss what Buckley had given the strikingly original code name of "*the plan*." Most days, Buckley would stop by his brother's room and the two would come up with outlandish schemes, involving everything from helicopter propellers to the possible usefulness of circus monkey's cigars. Anything and everything was discussed that could be used to help Robert get even, which was the ultimate goal of the plan. Anything to help pull Robert away from the miserable life he had been forced into and bring him back to normalcy. Anything to give him what Buckley referred to as "Robert's Righteous Vengeance!" Laughing to himself, Robert always thought the name sounded like it came right from a comic book. From the way Buckley talked about it, the way his childish imagination came up with new capers and plans to fix his situation, one would think it was. Unfortunately, solving Robert's problem wasn't too simple. For his wasn't one of the typical day-to-day difficulties people faced. His was unique, different. And as far as Robert could tell, it was unsolvable. However, as most problems do, whether it be work, school, family, or friends, Robert too had a name for his problem. Its name was "Ted."

As Robert made his way around the small room, putting himself

through his daily morning routine, Phyllis began making a sickening, coughing noise from her corner of the room. With a look of concern, Robert watched as she wretched up and down with her coughs. He couldn't help but to wonder if he was doing the right thing in keeping her with him. She was clearly ill and didn't seem to enjoy Robert's company too much as she hadn't even spoken to him for days now. Hours would go by, all spent by her just staring longingly at the covered window, rarely moving, not making eye contact with Robert. Even at meals the two would act as if the other simply didn't exist. Ever since Buckley had snuck that minnow into some of her food, she had been in a sour mood. A good sense of humor was so hard to come by nowadays, and it seemed Phyllis was lacking in the department as much as she was some common civility towards himself and Buckley. Despite the cold shoulder he had been giving to his fellow inmate of this hotel room, Robert did admit that he had missed her voice in the mornings. For the first few days when she had told some of her old, dry, humorless jokes, at least it had been something to spread a smile across his face, at least it was a change from constantly thinking about his problem. At least she was someone other than Buckley to keep him company.

Glancing at the clock from the corner of his eye, Robert realized that at any moment his brother should be arriving, as he was already around twenty minutes late. Returning to the bed, Robert sat and waited for Buckley to make his patented entrance to his room. It was easy for Robert to excuse the regular tardiness of his brother and, frankly, Robert had himself to blame for his lateness. To put it lightly, Buckley wouldn't be becoming a Rhodes Scholar at any point in his life, and Robert had always gotten a laugh out of playing on his brother's simple-minded quirks.

It wasn't anyone's fault but his own that he had picked the room he had in this old hotel. Room forty-nine on the ninth floor. Even now Robert allowed himself a light chuckle in his daily joke he had made of his brother. Amongst Buckley's many difficulties, one had always been the differentiation between the numbers four and nine. As a child, every specialist the schools could afford tried to work Buckley through the differences, but nothing could convince him against his own preconceived notions about the two numbers. It must have been the similarities in their written curvatures, hell if Robert knew his brother's reasoning. All he knew was that by picking this room, he would at least get a small laugh each minute his brother was late by. Imagining Buckley searching desperately on the fourth floor for his brother before thinking to himself, "Maybe it was the fourth he was staying on," before promptly heading up to the ninth to look around. A good laugh was

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rare in Robert's current state. So if it had to be at his brother's expense, so be it.

Today though, Buckley was especially late, and just as Robert had begun considering heading to the lower levels of the hotel to steal Mr. Sanchez's phone to try and contact his brother, he heard a familiar, deep *thud* against the other side of his room door. Shaking his head, Robert stood and opened the door for his brother, who rubbed a sore forehead as he entered the room. Another of Buckley's slight kinks, he had never fully understood that other people didn't know what was happening in his own life. The old saying of "the world revolved around him" would be quite an understatement. Buckley would often as a child ask people about events in Buckley's life that the individual simply wasn't involved in. Needless to say, this caused considerable confusion for years for guests. Still today, Buckley was convinced that Robert would know when he was coming and would walk right into the door, finding no need to knock or even slow down. On occasion he would stumble in after a particularly hard collision, upset that his brother hadn't opened the door as he walked into it. Stepping into the room and shutting the door behind his brother, Robert tried not to think about how many times Buckley may run into doors today and every day on the way to finding his brother's room on the ninth floor. Growing up, Robert was often asked why his brother was a little slow minded. Maybe it's because he walks into closed wood doors hoping they'll open. "Who knows?" Robert thought to himself, "I'm no doctor." As usual this morning, Robert's sweet and helpful brother had a gleam in his eye that meant he had another plan to get back at Ted. And through Ted, Janice too would get what was coming to her...

The story of how Ted had wronged Robert and stolen Janice from him was the root of his problem but wasn't an easy tale to tell. For years Ted had been Robert's trusted legal advisor, Janice his loving wife, and through a mutual "business arrangement," the three were all financially secure and happily living their lives...for a period of time. This was the case until the day that Ted and Janice were found keeping a bit closer company than a lawyer should have with his client's wife. And though they had tried to explain otherwise, their surroundings didn't help their argument. Trying to absolve oneself of wrongdoing from behind a shower door is difficult enough, but when your accomplice is trying to hide their naked body behind the third party's wife, the feat is one rarely accomplished.

Despite Robert's innocence to marital wrongdoing, it wasn't long before he was slapped with the largest divorce settlement the state of

Montana had ever seen, which didn't go Robert's way. Robert never really had a chance in court, as Ted threatened to bring up the specifics of their "business arrangement" if Robert tried to dispute Janice taking all the couple's possessions. Sadly, the very reason Robert and Janice were financially secure was the same reason Robert would lose all his wealth in the court cases that followed. Robert had never had a fondness of work, and without going into too many details, he had amassed his small fortune by taking advantage of certain less-than-truthful insurance claims. The arrangement was simple: Robert set-up all the settlements, Ted got his healthy cut as his attorney, and Janice lived the life of luxury and was Robert's beautiful bride. For a time, Robert's life was what he considered perfect. With the help of his trusty lawyer, Robert had done it all: faked illness, collected life insurance from nonexistent relatives, property damage done by his own hand, even stepped in front of the wealthy population's moving cars (his personal favorite). For years, Robert had worked so that he would never have to step foot into the good old American workforce. After years of hardship, it all went down in flames because of a simple case of blackmail.

The pair of ex-wife and attorney would have gotten away with it too; there wasn't a word he could utter in his defense. During the trial he had had to simply sit and watch as the dumbfounded judge assigned item after item into Janice's possession. If Robert hadn't gotten his hands on the family safe one night while his ex-wife was being wined and dined by Ted, he would have been left penniless. Luckily, Robert had always kept the majority of his winnings in a safe to lessen the paper-trail after his settlements. He had always been careful not to involve too many people, and the bank would likely take interest in a man with his sizeable bank account who didn't hold a job. The only thing Robert was able to keep as part of his previous life, other than the contents of the safe, was Phyllis, who in all reality had always been closer to Janice than Robert. He had always felt guilty taking her with him, but wanted to make Janice suffer in any way he could, and if it meant taking her beloved Phyllis with him when he left, then so be it. Sadly, Robert had to admit that if he hadn't taken Phyllis that night, she would likely still be at Janice's side, living her life as happily as ever.

Ever since he had begun his life on the run from his ex-wife and lawyer, Robert had been staying at the Miltianov, a nearby hotel that happened to be under construction in its lower levels. Buckley had actually been helpful in getting Robert set-up there; he had been working in the construction and was able to get Robert into a room in the top floor. The only other person regularly in the hotel upper levels was the hotel owner Mr.

Sanchez, who lived on the seventh floor. Through all the trial and hardship of the last few weeks, it seemed his loving brother was the only person he could truly count on.

Looking at his brother who had sat down on the bed, giving his forehead a good rubbing to ease what was likely a profound headache judging from the sound he made against the door, Robert noticed a small brown bag sitting on the bed next to him.

“What’s in the bag, Buck?” Robert asked, feeling a hunger settling into his stomach. “Hope you brought me some lunch early today.”

As if he only suddenly remembered the reason he came up at the mention of the bag, Buckley stood, spun quickly to his left and emptied the contents of the bag on the small nightstand.

“I’ve got it, Robbiel!” Buckley’s voice boomed with excitement. “I’ve got it all figured out this time, just take a look at these! Guess what they are.” As he lifted the bag away from the table, anywhere from twenty to thirty blue pills danced out across its surface. The gentle hunger Robert had felt was quickly replaced by a stark nervousness. Robert knew this wasn’t going to be something he wanted to hear.

Out of the corner of his eye Robert watched Phyllis take notice of the sound of the pills scattering across the table. With an un-approving look, she raised her shoulders and turned her head down, clearly not wanting to take part in any of what was about to happen. She always seemed to behave like this when Buckley would come and they would talk about how to do in Janice and Ted. Every day it became more and more apparent that she hated being away from Janice and cooped up with Robert in the cramped hotel room, which was hardly large enough for two people. Not that the size of the room was too much of a problem when it was just the two of them, but once Buckley came the area became distinctly more cramped.

Noticing Robert looking over to where Phyllis sat with her back towards them, Buckley chuckled saying, “Well, what’s got her feathers in a ruffle? Dontcha like when your Uncle Buck comes to visit?”

“Don’t start on her again Buckley,” Robert spoke, trying to keep his tone level to not show his unease of the pills lying across the table. “What are these for exactly?”

Turning his attention away from Phyllis and back to the table and Robert, Buckley began his explanation with a smile. “Okay, Robert. Here’s the final, no two ways about it, last call, final horse in the barn, closing the doors ‘cause your momma don’t want you around no more, supreme end-all revision to *the plan*.” Looking up meet Robert’s gaze with raised eyebrows,

he paused, knowing his elder brother was eagerly awaiting his explanation. A little annoyed that Buckley was drawing this out so much, Robert motioned with his arm for him to continue.

“Well, you know Stu, works down at that place—“

“No, Buckley, I don’t know Stu, and I don’t know where he works,” Robert had to shake his head. This wasn’t starting off promisingly from Buckley.

“Oh, well, right,” Buckley said, trying to regain his lost momentum.

“Well, I got this friend Stu. He works at this coffee shop where I go get coffee every mornin’ before comin’ here to the Milti’ for work. And you’re never gonna guess who I saw the other day,” he paused for a full minute before realizing Robert wasn’t going to play along. “Ted was in there! I bumped right smack into him as he was walkin’ out the door, nearly spilled his coffee all over his fancy suit.”

Surprised, and pretty uneasy that Buckley had run into Ted, Robert asked in a slightly adverse voice, “What were you thinking Buck? Did he see you? Janice wasn’t there was she?”

“No, no, Robbie, calm down,” Buckley explained raising his hands to try and ease Robert. “Just let me explain everythin’ cause I gotta get back to the site before too long, else I get canned.” Waiting a quick moment to make sure Robert was finished, Buckley started in once more. “Okay, well, like I said I bumped right into him, and he didn’t even recognize me, not one bit, though I’m not sure if he really got a good look at me or not...Anyways, I started thinkin’ we know where he gets some of his drinks now, and I got a friend that works there, so...” he motioned towards the pills on the table with a nod of his head. “I figured we could slip a few of these into his cup next time he’s in, and ca-blewie!” he exclaimed, making a motion of a small explosion with his hands. “Problem solved!”

“What exactly do you mean problem solved?” Robert asked, picking up one of the pills nearest him. “What are these? And where the hell did you get them anyways?”

“Oh, they make you real sleepy, I think, and I got ‘em from a friend, y-you don’t know ‘em though.” The fact that Buckley threw on that Robert didn’t know them was a dead give-away. They were stolen. “They’re perfect though, they don’t taste like anythin’, and they just melt away when ya stick ‘em in some water.”

“Well, what are we going to do with sleeping pills Buck? Gonna hope just he has a dream to stop being a backstabbing-jackass?” Robert asked, still perplexed at what Buckley was getting at, though he did have to admit of all

his plans, this one had a chance at accomplishing something.

“They’re real strong Robbie, real strong. See, all we do is give him a few too many...and he doesn’t wake back-up...”

Those words rang in Robert’s ears. Sure, they had talked about killing Ted and, in all honesty, it would likely end everything since he had the only hard copies of all Robert’s court cases. Needless to say, Robert wasn’t the most ethical man in the world, but to really kill someone?

Interrupting Robert from his thoughts of doubt and uncertainty Buckley bellowed out, “Damn-it, is that the time?” He stood from the corner of the bed and quickly wiped the pills of the night stand back into the bag, doing so in such a rush some of them fell out onto the floor. “I gotta get back down there, or I’m canned for sure.”

Hastily he started making his way to the door, hardly giving Robert time to voice his objections. “Wait Buckley! This isn’t ri-“

“I know I know, it’s perfect, I can’t talk now though. I’ll give Stu the pills tonight and tell him to start lookin’ out for him first thing tomorrow.”

“No, Buckley! We can’t-“ Robert tried to object once more, but the door was already slammed shut behind his brother as he heard his heavy steps run down the hall. There was no point in chasing after him. By the time he got Buckley to stop, it’d likely be three floors and, by then, Mr. Sanchez would have probably heard Robert yelling for his brother to stop. Robert would have to just sit and wait. He would just have to hope his brother didn’t do anything too stupid so that he could tell him to stop everything tomorrow when he saw him again.

Despite his natural intentions to want to stop Buckley in what he was trying to do, he had to admit that some part of him wanted Ted to get his coffee tomorrow before he could stop Buckley. Sitting back down on the corner of the bed, Robert thought aloud to himself, “Wonder if coffee goes well with screwing your client’s wives? If so, maybe he does deserve a hot cup full of those blues tomorrow from Buckley.”

* * * *

Robert sipped carefully on his hot coffee as he waited for Buckley. Usually, stealing a cup from the coffee machine down the hall had a nice calming effect on Robert. Usually, it allowed him to feel at ease once more, feel a sense of normalcy. Unfortunately, today it only reminded him of what could be happening. If Ted had gotten his daily coffee from Buckley’s friend Stu, well, there may be an entirely new set of problems Robert would have to deal with. The police may get involved, Buckley could get caught, and

everything could become a lot more complicated than it was now. To make matters worse, Buckley hadn't stopped by the previous day, leaving Robert alone with his wandering thoughts. In the last twenty-four hours he had imagined every horrible outcome he could think of, the best of which ended with him in prison.

Robert was so lost in his thoughts, making himself more and more nervous as time passed, that he nearly hit the ceiling when he heard a familiar *thud* against the other side of the door. For a moment, Robert was certain it was the police, certain that Buckley had told them where to find him and that at any moment a swarm of armed officers would break down his door and take him away (likely kicking and screaming). After a good minute of cowering on the far side of the bed and hearing a frustrated mumble from the other side of the door, Robert raced up to let his brother in.

Opening it wide, his brother stood looking almost surprised to see Robert. "What took you so long? Thought I had the wrong room again," he pushed past Robert and made his way into the room, taking his usual seat on the side of the bed.

"Where the hell were you yesterday?!" Robert started, letting his pent up nervousness and frustration spill out at his brother. "What happened? Don't tell me you went through with it? We can't do this Buck, you have to tell your friend--"

"No-no, it's done Robbie!" Buckley stood from the bed, his face blanketed with a smile, his eyes wide as if he was just hearing for the first time himself what had happened. "Stu said it's all taken care of. Yesterday, Ted came in and got his coffee, and Stu dropped those blues right in there! It's all over Robbie! Tomorrow you're leavin' here and comin' to my place. Then you can start over! We did it!"

Robert was shocked. He couldn't think, couldn't reason. He sat on the bed next to Buckley, staring at the near blank wall. He didn't know whether to be jumping for joy or cursing at his brother for what he had done. On one hand, his problem was solved, it was all over. On the other hand, there was also a life on his and his brother's hands. Buckley had killed a man, and Robert did nothing to stop it.

"Ain'tcha excited Robert?" Buckley asked after several minutes of silence in the room. "It's all over. You got your life back. I can tell yer' in a state-a-shock. I bet you wanna cry a bit cuz' you're so happy and all. You can thank me when yer' finished."

Turning and looking at his brother, seeing his eyes so hopeful and yet worried, Robert knew what he had to say. "It's all going to be okay isn't

it Buck? It's finally over, huh?" He let out a small somber chuckle to reassure Buckley. There was no point in getting upset about it. What was done was done. He was going to be able to return to his life and, though it came at Ted's own life, he couldn't really be too upset about it. After all, Ted had ruined the life he had worked so hard to build.

"Great!" Buckley said as he stood and made his way back to the door. "I gotta get back down to work. The boss has been getting pretty mad about me taking breaks to find you. Tomorrow we're gettin' you outta here, Robbie. It's all through!"

As the door shut behind Buckley and he heard his brother stomp back down the halls, Robert was once more consumed by his thoughts, trying his best to push away the nagging realization that Ted had been murdered and that he was partially to blame. Maybe it was for the best that it ended this way. It had been a long time he had spent in this hotel and, seeing how there had been no other plans to get Robert's life back, maybe this was the only way. Looking over at Phyllis who appeared to be pretending to be asleep, likely so that she could plead ignorance to having heard what Buckley had just confessed to, Robert found himself able to accept what had happened. He, Phyllis, and Buckley could start a new life somewhere, free of the pursuit from Ted and his blackmail.

At least this way, Robert wouldn't have to spend nights imagining his ex-wife and lawyer eating expensive food, sipping fine wines, buying each other chocolates and flowers...well, maybe Ted would still receive some flowers once or twice a year. Then again, maybe not. Janice didn't seem like the mourning type really. Robert had to allow himself a small laugh at the thought. Knowing how Janice ended his marriage, she would likely start spending a little too much time with someone to take everything she could from her soon to be deceased husband. The cemetery's gravedigger would be a likely choice. After that, it would only be a matter time before Ted, already six feet under, would catch the pair just outside his plot, at which point Janice would use her relationship with the gravedigger to take the last thing she could get her hands on, his dirt.

With a laugh, Robert turned to Phyllis, trying to get out the words between chuckles. "I must've gotten off easy, huh Phyllis? At least she had the decency to leave me *dirt* poor. That's true love isn't it?"

* * * *

The next day, Robert had woken up late, fully rested, having gotten the first good night's sleep in days. Even Phyllis had slept in, having

relinquished her usual routine of clanking about, scraping her nails wherever she could and spouting whistles through the quiet air. Today, Robert had awoken peacefully, greeted by the sunlight already bending in and out of the waving, full-length blinds on the far wall. Walking over and drawing them open from the sliding glass doors leading outside, Robert looked onto the new day with a smile for the first time in weeks.

“Today is the start of something new Phyllis, you know that? Everything’s going to be better going forward, can you feel it?” Looking to his left, Phyllis made no indication that she had heard Robert say anything or that she planned to respond. She was too busy gazing out at the morning sky through the long glass, which hadn’t been opened for days. “Heh, well, you’ll see, you’re gonna havta trust me on this one. Things are looking up.” Still getting no response from Phyllis, Robert took a heavy sigh before repeating himself under his breath, “Yup, things are looking up.”

For the rest of the morning Robert had lazily walked throughout the room, picking up his various possessions, and stuffing them into his suitcase. There was no need for nervousness or stress, not anymore. His miraculous brother had taken care of everything, and when after a few hours he heard that gloriously familiar *thud* from the other side of the door, Robert answered it with more appreciation for his brother than he had felt in years. Unfortunately when he opened the door, the face which greeted him from the other side was one filled with fear and shock. Something had gone wrong.

“We’re done for Robbie!” Buckley shouted as he entered the room and began pacing back and forth before opening the sliding doors to the balcony.

Quickly following his brother, Robert stopped next to him, waiting for an explanation. His brother just stood over the balcony, eyes wide, face red, the fast breathing of terror escaping his lips. “What do you mean, Buck?” Robert asked using the calmest voice he could muster. “What happened?”

Buckley turned and looked at his brother, a look of offended confusion on his face. “You know what happened, Robbie! You know, and there’s nothin’ we can do! We gotta start gettin’ outta here!” With that, Buckley turned back to the room and stared at it for a moment, as if trying to resolve some complex problem that lay before him. “Yeah, gotta get outta here,” he repeated to himself as he made his way back into the room, grabbing a pair of Robert’s pants and throwing them out and over the balcony behind him.

“Whoa, Whoa, Buckley. What the hell are you doing?” Robert

exclaimed as he watched his brother start tossing socks and belts over his shoulder to the ground below. “Stop that!” Robert yelled, settling his brother’s shaking hands as he grabbed for a pair of Robert’s shoes. “What’s going on?! I have no idea what you’re doing!”

Dropping the shoes, Buckley turned to his brother in frustration. “YOU KNOW, ROBBIE! We can’t do this now, we gotta get out of here. Ted could be here any second!”

“Buck, we can’t have you doing this right now!” Robert yelled, trying to get his brother to snap out of his blocked mindset. “You need to tell me what happened! I wasn’t there! Tell me!”

Turning away from the bed and Robert’s possessions, Buckley began to explain, realizing he was playing into one of his oldest quarks. “Ted didn’t die somehow, hell if I know how. He just got knocked out after leaving the coffee shop. Stu said he came back yesterday, that he knew there was somethin’ wrong with his coffee, well, Stu...goddamn Stu...he told Ted everything! About you, about me, about where to find me, everything! Then this mornin’...well...he came to my apartment, and I let it slip that you were up here...” he looked up at Robert like a scolded dog, hoping to not receive a lashing. Robert couldn’t hold it in.

“Buck! What the hell?! How can you just ‘let it slip’ where I am? How could you let this happen? Can’t you do a goddamn thing right?! Why the hell didn’t the pills work?”

“It’s not my fault, Robbie! Look, I got these instructions and everythin’, and I told em’ to Stu. He’s the one that screwed everythin’ up for us! Just look, I got em’ right here!”

Out of his pocket Buckley pulled a wadded up piece of paper, and handed it to Robert. Taking it in his hands and unfolding it, Robert knew instantly what had happened and knew Stu wasn’t to blame. Scribbled out in blue pen in Buckley’s scratchy handwriting read a simple message, “1-2 pills avg. dose, 9+ fatal.” Closing his eyes with a heavy shake of his head, Robert crumpled the paper back up and shoved it into his pocket. He couldn’t bring himself to tell Buckley the truth, to tell him what had happened. If Robert was going to jail, he didn’t want Buckley to have to live with the guilt every day.

“Yeah, Buck. That Stu’s a real moron, I guess. What are we gonna do now?”

Instantly snapping out of his trance, Buckley began reaching for things to throw out the open glass door once more. “Hold it, Buckley, I’ll throw the suitcase out the front door. We’ll grab it on the way out.” If he was

going to be caught, Robert wanted to not have to spend his time picking up his possessions off the cement nine floors below.

“Good thinkin’, Robbie. I’ll get rid of the blankets. We gotta move fast though. Ted could be here any second!” Robert didn’t object as he walked towards the front door, neatly placing the suitcase outside. Though he was unsure how someone could use some old blankets to track him down.

Closing the door behind him, Robert was inexplicably calm. He knew it was over, he was going to be caught. He would take all the blame, try and get Buckley off with just some probation or a fine. Phyllis would go back to Janice, where she would likely be happier anyways. Everything was going to happen no matter what he tried to do now.

Taking a deep breath, Robert realized that his time as a free man was coming to a close quickly. Ted had likely already called the police or was on his way here himself. Knowing Ted, it was likely the latter. He always liked being there to rub someone’s face in when he and Robert would win their settlements. Turning back around, he watched as his brother picked up one of the last things in the room. In dismayed terror, Robert watched as his brother walked towards the balcony, Phyllis tucked under his arm.

Robert darted towards where his brother stood but couldn’t move or yell fast enough. In horror, Robert watched as Phyllis drifted over the thin railing of the balcony, and gently drifted towards the ground, almost gliding as she fell. In shock, Robert stood over the railing looking to the ground below before turning to his brother.

“There we go, that’s the last of it,” Buckley calmly said as he turned away from the railing. Robert was utterly astonished and appalled by his brother’s behavior. He had actually deemed it necessary to throw another living thing from nine stories up in a building. As Robert was about to turn and let his brother really have it, he was greeted by an unexpected third man who had entered the room. There, standing in the doorway, a fiendish smile across his beat red face stood that which all of Robert’s problem’s circled around. Ted.

Quickly striding across the room, Ted was on the balcony with Robert before he could even draw a breath of surprise. His face only inches away from Robert’s, Ted began let words spew out of his mouth as viciously as a torrent of gunfire. His usually neatly kept hair flowing in all directions, his blue shirt stained with sweat as he likely had just rushed up nine flights of stairs. One hand clenched a handful of papers, which he shook in Robert’s face before bringing them back to his side and replacing it with an accusing finger from the other. Robert watched as the vein in his forehead grew larger

and larger, becoming a near purple in color. His lips smacking out insults as spit spewed forth from behind them onto Robert's shirt and face. The words kept coming, each one cursing Robert, damning him, yelling in jubilation that Robert's life was over.

Though Robert heard them, they slipped past his thoughts. He didn't care, didn't want his final moments of freedom to have to be spent hearing this. Over Ted's shoulder Robert noticed how blue the sky was this morning, how wonderful of a final day of freedom it truly was. Looking back towards Ted from the corner of his eye, Robert continued to ignore the insults and lashings that flowed from his mouth. It was strange, almost like turning off the volume on a movie, and simply watching the background move behind the actors. Everything seemed to slow down, Robert only stood and let Ted yell, just enjoying the scenery of the morning.

As Ted moved away and began pacing back and forth on the narrow balcony, Robert caught a glimpse of something coming over the roof of the building, a kind of shadow of some sort. Before Robert knew what was happening, there was a vicious flap of feathers against Ted's head, causing him to stumble backwards and fall hard into the railing. With a sharp *snap* the thin railing gave way and, in an instant, Ted was gone, a slew of papers following him down floor after floor.

Amazed and confused by the turn of events, Robert turned to his right and, there, sitting on the bent railing next to him, was Phyllis. A piece of Ted's Blue shirt attached to her beak.

* * * *

The next day Robert spent comfortably sitting in Buckley's brown leather chair, flipping through news cast after news cast covering the strange death of one Ted Dash. As he settled on one station the news caster stated, "Tragedy struck newlywed Ted Dash when his body was found yesterday morning at the downtown hotel, the Miltianov. Ted was believed to have been leaning on the yet to be repaired balcony railing somewhere on the upper floors. Construction had already begun on the lower floors. Management told us the repairs of the outdated railings were one of the major projects. It's still unknown why Mr. Dash was in the closed hotel or why an odd assortment of clothes and hotel room items were found on the ground near the body. Janice Dash, Ted's new wife, declined to comment..." Turning the TV off, Robert turned and looked lovingly over at Phyllis.

"What a beautiful bird," Robert said aloud as he gently stroked the

back of the parrot's head. "Through all of this, from start to finish, you were the only thing that stayed by my side, weren't you girl?" Sitting back in Buckley's chair, Robert had to laugh at the last few weeks. After spending so much time alone in that room with Phyllis, Robert had stopped looking at her as simply a pet or even as a bird. She was a companion, a true friend.

While Robert was absent minded holding a cracker, for the first time in weeks, Phyllis's squawky voice chimed out, "Things looking up."

Laughing, Robert sunk into the heavy leather of the chair, "That's right, Phyllis. Things are looking up, aren't they? Though when I said that yesterday, I had no idea this is how it would wind up."

As the day wore by and Robert began to let himself relax more and more, he found himself thinking of what to do about Janice. With Ted gone, maybe he could actually just contact her directly, tell her to forget taking about all his money. Weighing his options, Robert considered each of them thoroughly. Maybe he'd send her a letter, maybe an email, maybe a phone call, or maybe, just maybe, he'd get in touch with her via some kind of carrier bird...glancing over at Phyllis, Robert laughed heartily. Then again, maybe that'd be a little unreasonable, considering the situation.